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K.G.B. Praised by Some and Feared by Many

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 12 — The K.G.B., the Committee for State Security, is praised by the Communist leadership as the "sword and shield" of the Soviet Union, and, at the same time, is the most widely feared instrument of the Government.

Inside the Soviet Union its 90,000 or so staff officers guard against internal security threats and run the political prisons. Along the fringes, 175,000 of its border troops patrol the Soviet Union's 41,800 miles of frontiers. Beyond Soviet borders, its scientific-technical operatives sweep Western countries seeking the latest secret inventions, while its "illegals" try to penetrate foreign intelligence operations.

In some aspects the K.G.B. is a government within a government, operating under its own rules. In 1953, after the death of Stalin, it was accused of trying a coup in the Kremlin, using secret police troops. Its chief, Lavrenti P. Beria, was seized by his party comrades and shot.

Not until 20 years later did the K.G.B. regain some respect within the Soviet Union through the election of its director, Yuri V. Andropov, to the Communist Party's ruling Politburo.

Students of Russia have often remarked that a native penchant for secretiveness together with a fear of foreign designs upon Russia made a powerful state secret police an almost natural Russian phenomenon.

Indeed the first Communist secret service, the Cheka — All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counterrevolution, Speculation and Sabotage — virtually copied the Czarist secret police organization and even coopted some of its more capable officers. Cheka's founder, Feliks E. Dzerzhinsky, was quoted as saying, "Trust is good, but control is better," and, in 1918, "We stand for organized terror."

Through all its transformations, to G.P.U., to O.G.P.U., to G.U.G.B./N.K.V.D., to N.K.G.B., to M.G.B. and, in 1954, to the K.G.B., its officers have continued, proudly, to refer to themselves as "Chekists." To the envy of foreign intelligence officers, the Soviet service retains key personnel for many decades, providing a kind of continuity particularly valuable in counterintelligence. "I wish we had their continuity," said James J. Angleton, retired head of the C.I.A.'s counterintelligence branch, in assessing the K.G.B. a few years ago.

In its earlier years the Soviet secret police acquired a reputation as an instrument of mass terror: beginning in the 1920's as the organizer and supplier at home of huge concentration camps where millions perished, in the 1930's as Stalin's executor of huge purges of the party and the Red Army officer corps and, in the late 1940's and 50's, as the perpetrator of assassinations of opponents abroad. The latter killings were performed by a group specialized in what Soviet intelligence calls "wet affairs."

According to Oleg A. Lyalin, a "wet affairs" expert who defected to Britain 11 years ago, the K.G.B. halted its political assassination program in 1959.

In the view of Western intelligence specialists the K.G.B., while retaining excellent abilities in traditional espionage, appears in recent years to have devoted greater resources to acquiring Western military and industrial technology. Thus in the last decade the K.G.B. has, in addition to penetrating the coderooms of the NATO alliance, acquired the plans of American spy satellites, advanced radar, computer source codes and conventional weapon innovations.

Many of these acquisitions may be attributed to Mr. Andropov, for under his supervision the K.G.B. became, in addition to its conventional tasks, a kind of office for technology transfer from the West.